DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 472 733 PS 031 001

| | |
|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Brewster, Cori; Railsback, Jennifer |
| TITLE | Full-Day Kindergarten: Exploring an Option for Extended Learning. |
| INSTITUTION | Northwest Regional Educational Lab., Portland, OR. |
| SPONS AGENCY | Department of Education, Washington, DC. |
| PUB DATE | 2002-12-00 |
| NOTE | 61p.; Published quarterly for NWREL member institutions. |
| CONTRACT | ED-01-CO-0013 |
| AVAILABLE FROM | Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 101 S.W. Main Street, Suite 500, Portland, OR 97204-3297. Tel: 505-275-9720; Web site: http://www.nwrel.org/request. |
| PUB TYPE | Guides - Non-Classroom (055) -- Information Analyses (070) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) |
| EDRS PRICE | EDRS Price MF01/PC03 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | Educational Improvement; Elementary School Curriculum; *Full Day Half Day Schedules; *Kindergarten; *Kindergarten Children; Preschool Curriculum; Program Descriptions; School Readiness; *School Schedules |
| IDENTIFIERS | Program Characteristics; United States (Northwest) |

ABSTRACT

Noting that full-day kindergarten has become an increasingly popular scheduling option in U.S. schools during the past 30 years, this booklet provides a brief review of recent literature on full-day programs and highlights important considerations for educators, policymakers, and parents assessing their kindergarten options. The booklet also profiles several full-day kindergarten programs in place in northwestern U.S. schools. Following introductory remarks, the booklet examines issues related to the curricular content of the extra time, school readiness, and cost. It is noted that drawing conclusions from the existing research is not easy, in part because kindergarten practices and student populations vary widely and because there are few studies in which students are assigned randomly to full- and half-day classrooms. Benefits of full-day kindergarten for students, parents, and teachers are delineated. The booklet also lists characteristics of effective kindergarten programs and offers tips for implementing successful full-day kindergarten programs. Questions to guide parents in considering which program will work best for their kindergarten child are included. The booklet then lists considerations for policymakers. Four profiles are provided of schools offering full- or extended-day kindergarten programs in the northwest; the profiles include staff-observed outcomes/benefits and challenges of the full-day program and keys to success. The booklet concludes by noting that choosing a kindergarten schedule depends on multiple factors, including the students' needs; the needs and wishes of parents, teachers, administrators, and community members; and the availability of space, teachers, funding, and other resources. Also included are a 6-item annotated bibliography of studies on full-day kindergarten and a list of resources. (Contains 32 references.) (KB)

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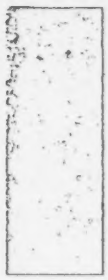

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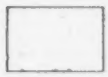

# FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN: Exploring an Option for Extended Learning


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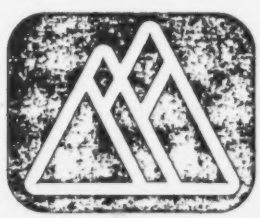
PLANNING & PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT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# FOREWORD

This booklet is one in a series of "hot topics" reports produced by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. These reports briefly address current educational concerns and issues as indicated by requests for information that come to the Laboratory from the Northwest region and beyond. Each booklet contains a discussion of research and literature pertinent to the issue, a sampling of how Northwest schools and programs are addressing the issue, selected resources, and contact information.

One objective of the series is to foster a sense of community and connection among educators. Another is to increase awareness of current education-related themes and concerns. Each booklet gives practitioners a glimpse of how fellow educators from around the Northwest are addressing issues, overcoming obstacles, and attaining success. The goal of the series is to give educators current, reliable, and useful information on topics that are important to them.

Information for this booklet was collected from the Educational Resource and Information Center (ERIC) databases, the Educational Research Service (ERS), the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), and peer-reviewed educational research journals, as well as from Northwest educators themselves. Every effort has been made to cite the most recent, relevant, and reliable sources on the issue at hand.



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# INTRODUCTION

Also known as all-day or extended-day kindergarten, full-day kindergarten has become an increasingly popular scheduling option in U.S. schools during the past three decades. Since the 1970s the number of U.S. children enrolled in full-day kindergarten has more than tripled (Miller, 2002). Currently, 60 percent of kindergartners spend between five and six hours every day in the classroom, twice the amount of time spent by students in more traditional half-day programs (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001).

There are a number of reasons—social and economic, as well as educational—that full-day kindergarten has experienced such significant growth. The increase in single-parent and dual-wage-earner families, for one, has greatly expanded the need for all-day, out-of-home care for young children (Miller, 2002; West, Denton, & Germino-Hausken, 2000). Two large-scale studies show that more and more students in the United States enter kindergarten with limited emergent literacy skills or lacking a strong foundation in the English language (Denton, 2000; Long, 1997; West et al., 2000). In many districts, the increased emphasis on standards and accountability, combined with higher numbers of educationally and economically disadvantaged students, has led schools to lengthen the kindergarten day. More time, it is hoped, will help to close the achievement gap and lead to higher test scores and lower in-grade retention rates.

The move toward full-day kindergarten has not been without its skeptics, however. Elkind (2000), for example, has characterized full-day kindergarten as "a good illustration



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of how a social problem"—in this case, increased childcare needs—"gets misinterpreted and given an educational solution" (p. 15). The consequence of this, he argues, is that educators have raised their expectations for entering first-graders and have become increasingly willing to retain less prepared children in kindergarten. Other critics of full-day kindergarten argue that curriculum and instruction have much more to do with the quality of a child's kindergarten experience than the length of the school day. Still others contend that for kindergartners "from a home already rich in educational experiences, the kindergarten schedule is not going to make much of a difference" (Hildebrand, 2001).

Complicating the issue has been limited and sometimes conflicting research into the effectiveness of full-day kindergarten. Given the significant differences between full-day kindergarten programs around the country, it is difficult to compare findings across studies, much less isolate the effects of curricula or teaching methods from the number of hours kindergarten students spend in class.

As full-day kindergarten generates increased attention from both parents and policymakers, however, one thing is certain: teachers, administrators, and school board members will continue to be asked to weigh the costs and benefits of offering full-day versus half-day or alternating full-day kindergarten. This booklet provides a brief review of recent literature on full-day programs and highlights important considerations for educators, policymakers, and parents assessing their kindergarten options. The final section of the booklet, the Northwest Sampler, profiles several full-day kindergartens already in place in Northwest schools.

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# IN CONTEXT: ISSUES SURROUNDING FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN

In communities considering full-day kindergarten, three main issues commonly surface: content, school readiness, and cost.

## CONTENT

Perhaps the most important question asked when considering whether to offer full-day kindergarten is, what will the extra hours be used for? It is not uncommon to hear that full-day kindergarten will only be used for additional playtime or as a state-funded alternative to childcare (NASBE, 1999). Others voice concern that first-grade curriculum will be inappropriately pushed down to kindergarten-age children, or that kindergarten will become "too academic" (Cromley, 1996; Elicker & Mathur, 1997; Pappano, 2001).

At the center of these concerns are disagreements about kindergarten goals and appropriate practice (Vecchiotti, 2001). What is kindergarten for? How do children learn at this age, and what learning conditions are optimal? What can reasonably be expected of children preparing to enter first grade? While some advocates of full-day kindergarten urge schools to use the extra hours to increase the "academic rigor" of kindergarten (Weast, 2001), others suggest that the time is best spent on more student-directed activities, more field trips and "hands-on" learning experiences, and a less hurried exploration of the same content offered in quality half-day pro-





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grams (Fromberg, 1995; Lofthouse, 1994; Miller, 2002). Clearly, the content question is not a small one. Districts considering implementing a full-day kindergarten will need to spend considerable time assessing the curricular needs of their kindergarten population, investigating developmentally appropriate kindergarten practices, mapping out program goals and philosophies, and reassuring skeptics that activities designed for older students will not simply be foisted upon five-year-old children (da Costa and Bell, 2000; Miller, 2002). For a summary of effective kindergarten practices, see Page 14.

## School Readiness

A related area of concern often raised has to do with school readiness. The most pressing issue cited is the growing gap between the skills children bring to school and the skills that schools expect (Lonigan &Whitehurst, 1998). Increasing numbers of children are entering half-day kindergarten programs with limited language, literacy, and general knowledge skills as well as a lower level of emotional maturity, motivation, and social confidence than is needed to be successful in school (Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998; Pianta, 2002; West et al., 2000). According to a survey of kindergarten teachers conducted by the National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL), almost half expressed serious concerns about the children entering their classrooms each fall. The most frequently cited problem was children's inability to follow directions (46%), followed by low pre-academic skills (36%), inability to work independently (34%), inability to work in a group (30%), and inability to communicate effectively (14%)" (Pianta, 2002, p. 6).



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Lack of school readiness skills has been strongly linked to family income in several recent studies (Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998; Pianta, 2002). In general, lower-income children have fewer books, early learning experiences, and other resources that support emergent literacy than do upper-income children (American Federation of Teachers, 2002; Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998). Children from low-income families who are also English language learners are at even greater risk.

For these less-prepared students, many teachers argue, half-day kindergarten simply does not provide enough time to meet kindergarten outcomes and prepare for first grade (Porch, 2002). Full-day kindergarten is viewed as a way not only to help level the playing field for children with limited skills, but to reduce the chances of their being retained—a practice strongly opposed by early childhood experts (National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education [NAECS/SDE], 2000).

Questions about school readiness have led many districts to offer both full- and half-day kindergarten. Some schools limit enrollment in full-day programs to lower-income students or students who are learning English as a second language. Other programs, recognizing that kindergarten-age children have diverse needs and abilities, open their doors to all students, but let parents choose between enrolling their children in a half- or full-day classroom.

## Cost

A final area of concern is cost. As one Northwest teacher put it, "All the talk about the benefits of full-day kindergarten falls on deaf ears around here. Our district simply can't—or



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won't—afford it." To be sure, implementing full-day kindergarten is an expensive proposal in most districts. Staffing and classroom needs double, as does the cost of supplies. Computers, books, and other teaching materials previously used for two groups of students in a half-day program may not be easily shared between two full-day classrooms. There may also be the cost of adopting a new curriculum to consider, as well as the cost of training teachers, principals, and other school staff members to implement it (Fromberg, 1995).

Proponents of full-day programs point out that there are ways to save money by switching to full-day kindergarten. Mid-day bus service is no longer needed if all grades begin and end school at the same time, for example (Fromberg, 1995). Others note that the lower grade-retention rates resulting from full-day kindergarten save districts money over the long term. Weiss and Offenberg's (2002) study of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania's, kindergarten program found that "the lower retention rates for graduates of Philadelphia's full-day classes shave close to 19 percent off of the cost of providing them, which in 1999 came to about $2 million for every 1,000 kindergartners" (Viadero, 2002). For districts competing for enrollment with private schools, full-day kindergarten may also be seen as a worthwhile investment in terms of recruiting students into the public school system (Cromley, 1996).

Schools currently offering full-day kindergarten deal with funding issues in a number of different ways. Many schools that serve low-income and language minority students use Title I money to support their programs (Nelson, 2000). Other schools rely on private or state grant funding, and still others charge parents partial tuition to offset the cost of the extra hours added to the kindergarten day (Lofthouse, 1994; Long, 1997).

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## WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

Unfortunately, drawing conclusions from the existing research on full-day kindergarten is not easy—in part because kindergarten practices and student populations vary so widely from school to school. Many of the benefits associated with full-day kindergarten remain anecdotal, or are based on single-district studies that failed to control for family income level, mobility, parents' level of education, or other factors that may affect student performance, regardless of kindergarten schedule. Isolating the effects of extra class time from factors such as class size, teaching methodology, teacher experience, and parent involvement has also proven to be difficult. A change in curriculum alone when moving from half-day to a full-day schedule may be responsible for differences in academic achievement (Elicker, 2000).

Another problem with the available research on full-day kindergarten is that there have been few studies in which students were assigned randomly to the full- and half-day classrooms being studied (Elicker, 2000; Weiss & Offenberg, 2002). Instead, particularly in pilot programs, students tend to be enrolled in full-day kindergarten voluntarily. Far from providing a random sample of the student population, this practice may tilt research in favor of full-day kindergarten simply because greater numbers of educationally advantaged children signed up.

As a result of these limitations, findings on full-day kindergarten are often mixed. (For an annotated list of some of these studies, see the Resources section.) James Elicker, an





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early childhood researcher at Purdue University, conducted a two-year evaluation of a Wisconsin full-day program, and critically reviewed the research on full-day kindergarten (see Elicker, 2000; Elicker & Mathur, 1997). Elicker's examination of the research yields the following conclusions:

- Students participating in full-day kindergarten consistently progress further academically during the kindergarten year, as assessed by achievement tests, than students in either half-day or alternate-day programs.

- There is tentative evidence that full-day kindergarten has stronger, longer-lasting academic benefits for children from low-income families or others with fewer educational resources prior to kindergarten.

- There is not current, strong evidence that the academic achievement gains of full-day kindergarten persist beyond first grade for all students.

- There is no evidence for detrimental effects of full-day kindergarten. The full-day curriculum, if developmentally appropriate for five- and six-year-olds, does not seem to overly stress or pressure kindergarten children.

- Kindergarten teachers and parents strongly value the increased flexibility and opportunities to communicate and individualize instruction for children offered by the full-day schedule.

(Elicker, 2000, pp. 8-9)

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Practitioners and parents have attributed several benefits to full-day kindergarten:

**Benefits for students**

- More "time and opportunity to play with language" (Fromberg, 1995, p. 236), as well as to explore subjects in depth (Vecchiotti, 2001)
- A more flexible, individualized learning environment (Vecchiotti, 2001)
- More individual and small-group interaction with the teacher than is possible in most half-day classrooms (Porch, 2002; Vecchiotti, 2001)

**Benefits for parents**

- Lowered childcare costs possible (Rothenberg, 1995)
- The opportunity for lower-income families to enroll children in a higher quality early education program than might otherwise be affordable in the private market (Vecchiotti, 2001)
- Less difficulty scheduling childcare and transportation (Vecchiotti, 2001)
- Increased opportunities to get involved in their children's classroom, as well as to communicate with the teacher

**Benefits for teachers**

- Reduced ratio of transition time to learning time (Miller, 2002)
- More time to spend with students individually and in small groups (Porch, 2002)
- More time to get to know and communicate with parents (Vecchiotti, 2001)
- More time to assess students and individualize instruction to their needs and interests (Nelson, 2000; Vecchiotti, 2001)
- Fewer total students—20 to 25 per year as compared to 40 to 50—than in two half-day classrooms (Elicker, 2000)

The Northwest Sampler section of this booklet chronicles observations from regional educators about benefits and challenges to full-day kindergarten.

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# CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS

As noted earlier in the booklet, reaping the benefits of full-day kindergarten probably has as much—if not more—to do with the quality of curriculum and instruction as it does with the length of the kindergarten day (Karweit, 1992, p. 85). High-quality full-day programs meet the same basic criteria that high-quality half-day programs do: they are "developmentally appropriate, informal, [and] intellectually engaging" (Miller, 2002), teaching children academic skills "within a play-based curriculum that takes into account the wide range of skill levels present in a kindergarten classroom..." (Porch, 2002).

According to a report from the ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education (EECE), the most effective kindergartens:

- Integrate new learning with past experiences through project work and through mixed-ability and mixed-age grouping in an unhurried setting;
- Involve children in firsthand experience and informal interaction with objects, other children, and adults;
- Emphasize language development and appropriate emergent literacy experiences;
- Make it easier to work with parents to share information about their children, and build understanding of parent and teacher roles;



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- Emphasize reading to children in school and at home, and set the stage for later parent-teacher partnerships;
- Offer a balance of large-group, and individual activities;
- Assess students' progress through close teacher observation and systematic collection and examination of students' work, often by using portfolios; and
- Develop children's social skills, including conflict resolution strategies.

(Miller, 2002)

Small class sizes, well-designed classrooms, high levels of parent involvement, and extras such as P.E., art, and music are also associated with effective programs (Graue, 1999; Vecchiotti, 2001).

For more information on effective kindergarten practices, including early literacy, see the Resources section of this booklet.

# IMPLEMENTING FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN: TIPS FOR SUCCESS

To be sure, there is no one way to design a strong full-day program. As administrators and program planners consider developing a full-day program, however, there are a number of important steps to keep in mind.

- **Assess the need and support for full-day kindergarten in your community.** Survey parents, Head Start staff, and primary teachers. If possible, gather data on entering kindergartners and first-graders. Which students are most likely to benefit from a full-day kindergarten? Is there a need for a bilingual full-day program? What percentage of parents favor and support full-day programs, and how many favor sticking with half-day kindergarten?

- **Form a steering committee to spearhead initial research and planning.** The committee should include all stakeholders, from parents and teachers to school board members and local preschool providers. Among other things, the steering committee will need to:

  - **Examine the impact of a full-day kindergarten on the school budget**, including the cost of transportation and additional school staff.

  - **Solicit and secure program funding.**

  - **Identify available classroom space.**



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- **Draft a statement of program goals and identify underlying philosophies.** Is the purpose of moving to full-day to expand the kindergarten curriculum, or to provide students more time to cover existing material in depth? What should full-day kindergartners know and be able to do by the end of the school year? At the beginning? The more specific program planners can be about their objectives and the assumptions driving the program, the easier it will be to develop assessment tools, choose appropriate curriculum, and identify which students it will best serve.

- **Determine how students will be selected for the program.** In New Mexico, where more than half the students currently attend full-day kindergarten, "indicators determining what kids get phased in [to full-day classrooms] first are poverty/free-reduced [price] lunch rates, mobility and limited English proficiency" (Tirado, 2001, p. 14). Other schools use a lottery system to select students when the demand for full-day kindergarten exceeds available space.

- **Devote adequate time to selecting curriculum and preparing teachers to implement it.** Fromberg (1995) recommends that teachers be given multiple opportunities to visit existing full-day kindergartens to gather ideas. Both teachers and administrators should be provided time and encouragement to attend professional conferences and other relevant training. Time should also be set aside for kindergarten and first-grade teachers to exchange ideas, discuss gaps in curriculum, and plan collaboratively throughout the school year (Fromberg, 1992).

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◇ **Actively solicit parent involvement and support.** As early as possible, prepare materials for parents that describe the kindergarten options available at your school. Note opportunities for parents to get involved, share research on ways kindergarten-age children learn, and provide detailed information on your program's philosophy and goals.

◈ **Provide ample classroom support for teachers.** Good (1996) found that "being with the same group of young children for a full-day with the additional responsibilities of dressing/undressing children for recess three times per day, of collecting lunch money and assisting with lunches, of coping with tired children in the afternoon, and of adjusting the curriculum to the new schedule were quite stressful for teachers..." (p. 31). Whether teachers receive help in the classroom from parent volunteers or from paid assistants, regular and reliable support is essential.

◈ **Conduct regular program evaluation.** Especially in the early years of a program, collecting data on student performance and feedback from parents provides valuable information for improvement. Clear evidence of program effectiveness may also help secure funding for the full-day kindergarten down the road. If possible, design assessment tools that control for other factors that may have an impact on student performance in kindergarten, and be sure that research groups represent the entire kindergarten population.

The Northwest Sampler at the end of the book provides more specific ideas from educators themselves on developing and implementing a full-day kindergarten program.



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# CONSIDERATIONS FOR PARENTS

For many parents whose children have already spent whole days in preschool or childcare, full-day kindergarten only makes sense. It's less expensive, it's easier to schedule, and children have fewer new environments to adjust to throughout the day than they would moving between home, half-day kindergarten, and childcare (Rothenberg, 1995). For other parents, though, the decision between kindergarten schedules is not so clearcut. The following questions are offered as a guide for parents considering which kindergarten program will work best for their children.

## Questions Parents Should Ask Themselves

- What skills and experiences will my child gain in full-day kindergarten that he or she would not gain at home, in childcare, or in a half-day program?

- How does my child compare to other five-year-olds socially and academically? Would he or she benefit from additional in-class time to develop literacy and other skills?

- What topics and types of activities interest my child? What kind of program is most likely to draw on these interests and use them to engage my child in learning?

- What kind of feedback have I received from preschool providers or others about my child's needs and abilities? What would they suggest about my child being enrolled in kindergarten full day?

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◇ How much time has my child spent away from home or another familiar environment? How does he or she typically respond to other children and adults?

◆ Does my five-year-old still need a nap during the day? Is he or she likely to be worn out by a full day of school? How likely is he or she to adjust in a short time to the length of the school day?

## Questions Parents Should Ask Teachers

◆ How are the school's full-day classrooms different than the half-day or alternating full-day classrooms? What advantages or disadvantages do you see to each?

◆ What will a typical day look like in your class?

◆ How much time will students in your classroom spend at a desk, and how much time will they be engaged in hands-on, small-group, individual, and child-directed activities?

◆ What do you believe about the ways kindergarten-age children learn? Do you consider the full-day curriculum to be developmentally appropriate?

◆ How many adults will there be per child in the classroom at any one time? What roles will they play?

◆ What do you expect my child to know before he or she arrives in your classroom?

◆ What do the first-grade teachers expect children to know by the beginning of first grade?

- How many children are retained in first grade each year, and for what reasons?
- How will the school communicate with me about my child's needs and accomplishments?
- What opportunities are there for me to get involved in my child's class?
- Will kindergartners share the playground, the school bus, or the cafeteria with older children? If so, how will they be supervised?

Of course, throwing all these questions at a new teacher at once might be a little much, especially if this is his or her first year in a full-day classroom. You might start by contacting the teacher about your greatest concerns on the phone or via e-mail, and then continue the discussion later in person. You may also want to talk with other parents whose children have previously attended a full-day kindergarten or have been taught by that teacher.

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

Only eight states and the District of the Columbia currently require schools to provide full-day kindergarten, although many more have considered legislation in recent years that would either fund or mandate schools to provide it (Viadero, 2002). In both Oregon and Montana, for example, bills related to full-day kindergarten have been proposed in the legislature, but have generated too little support to make it out of committee.

Across the United States, states that have successfully adopted legislation related to full-day kindergarten have done one or more of the following:

- Voted to provide funding for full-day kindergarten but not require that districts offer it (NASBE, 1999)
- Offered grant funding for improving and/or expanding existing full-day kindergarten programs (Indiana)
- Targeted funding for full-day kindergarten programs that serve educationally disadvantaged students (Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, 2000; NASBE, 1999)
- Mandated all districts to offer full-day kindergarten as an option, but not require that students attend (NASBE, 1999)
- Mandated that all schools offer and all eligible students enroll in full-day kindergarten (NASBE, 1999)

As the National Association of State Boards of Education (1999) notes, policymakers would do well to talk with par-



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ents, teachers, administrators, and other key stakeholders to determine which policy initiatives would best meet the needs of kindergartners in their area. Depending on funding, they may also "wish to weigh the benefits of full-day kindergarten against those of other initiatives—such as pre-kindergarten programs, smaller class sizes for grades K–3, and modified curriculum for half-day programs—based upon the needs of the state's population and the quality of their curriculum and implementation" (p. 1).

More information on current legislation related to kindergarten can be found on the Education Commission of the States' Web site at www.ecs.org/html/IssueSection.asp?issueid=77&s=What+States+Are+Doing

## CONCLUSION

Which kindergarten schedule is best? Probably the easiest answer to this question is still "it depends." Like most issues in education, choosing a kindergarten schedule depends on multiple factors, including the needs of the students to be served; the needs and wishes of parents, teachers, administrators, and community members; and the availability of space, teachers, funding, and other resources necessary to implementing a program successfully.

Given adequate resources and support, and a high-quality kindergarten curriculum, however, there are good arguments for offering students and parents the choice of all-day, everyday kindergarten. Particularly for students from low-income, second language, and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds, full-day kindergarten looks to be a worthwhile investment in moving students toward greater social and academic success. For students who would otherwise make multiple transitions between home, childcare, and school each day, full-day kindergarten offers a more stable, less stressful, stimulating environment in which to learn and grow (Vecchiotti, 2001). As the schools profiled in the following Northwest Sampler demonstrate, there is much to be gained by making full-day kindergarten an option.

# NORTHWEST SAMPLER

On the following pages we profile four schools in the Northwest that are currently offering full- or extended-day kindergarten programs. Three schools have had full-day scheduling for several years, one is in its second year of implementation. Some have a special emphasis on education for English language learners and for students from diverse cultures. Teachers and administrators have observed that students in these programs are benefiting from more individualized attention, smaller-group instruction, extended periods of reading instruction, and the ability to explore more subjects in depth.

Our intention is to share the experiences, observed outcomes, challenges, and "tips for success" of these regional educators. Please contact the educators directly for more information.

## Location

Harborview Elementary School
1255 Glacier Avenue (building address)
10014 Crazy Horse Drive (mailing address)
Juneau, AK 99801

## Contact

Kathleen Yanamura, Principal
Vivian Montoya, Teacher
Phone: 907-463-1875
E-mail: yanamurk@jsd.k12.ak.us
Web site: www.jsd.k12.ak.us/hbv

## Description

Harborview is one of six elementary schools in the Juneau School District. The district has a diverse student population, with a high percentage of Alaska Native students. Along with a focus on using multiple assessments to ensure that all students meet standards, the district strives to develop successful programs to ensure that their Native and minority students achieve success. The district strongly believes that by honoring the students' native culture and language throughout the schools, they will be engaged and motivated to succeed.

In keeping with these goals, Harborview offers several options for kindergarten students including a mixed-age K-1 class, a Tlingit cultural immersion K-1 class, a looping K-1 class (children have the same teacher for kindergarten and first grade), and a regular extended-day kindergarten. All



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kindergarten and first-grade classes last five hours per day. NWREL talked with Harborview teacher Vivian Montoya about her experiences with extended-day scheduling and looping. Montoya, who has 20 years of teaching experience, is Alaska's 2002 Teacher of the Year. Since 1997, she has taught an extended-day looping class in which she stays with a kindergarten class through first grade. Her kindergarten class last year had 20 students; one-third were of ethnic minority groups including Hispanic, Chinese/Vietnamese, and Tlingit/Filipino.

Because there are many options for kindergarten, we asked Montoya how children get placed in their class. "We try not to recommend one program over another," she explains. "We have an elaborate equity plan for placing children to balance the classrooms for ethnicity, and gender, and then try to meet specific requests." Although the class is officially five hours a day, parents do have the option of having their child leave up to two hours early.

Montoya's philosophy and influences come from the Bank Street early childhood education model, which uses developmentally appropriate learning activities, focusing on play and play space. She has strong academic expectations based on each child's individual needs. Montoya teaches the children to care for each other, and promotes a responsive classroom where students develop rules of conduct. One way of doing this is by using a talking circle to help children discuss rules. "Rules come from the kids, they own them when they are part of developing their own rules," she explains. Montoya offers some observations related to the benefits of looping, and the benefits and challenges of an extended-day curriculum:



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## Observed Outcomes/Benefits of Extended-Day/Looping

Looping helps the teacher focus on the needs of each child and have time to plan for two years to meet them. During the summer, Montoya is able to plan first grade more effectively because of having known the students. "They are not just blank faces," she says.

The teacher's relationship with the child is critical to learning. Looping strengthens this relationship with the child and the child's family.

## Challenges of an Extended-Day Schedule

Staff members are beginning to feel greater pressure to incorporate more academic components in the curriculum. These pressures are in response to concerns about test scores and dropout rates. Says Montoya, "I am responding by looking at individual students more closely and working hard to meet each one's needs. I also spend more time on record keeping and looking at myself as a teacher-researcher to determine what works for kids. We try to think of ways to teach skills that are incorporated into activities, play, and projects, rather than just rote training."

## Tips for Success

- Encourage parent and community involvement in the classroom. "I have never taught without parents in my classroom," says Montoya. She has a student teacher assisting her with special needs children, and has other aides and many parent volunteers. Parents are an important rea-



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son for the success of classroom organization and student engagement. Montoya encourages the parents to plan and implement activities, especially when they are really invested in the topic. For example, one father who has an interest in ecology and nature did a "plant of the week" lesson. High school students volunteer in the classroom as part of their community service. Harborview is also in a partnership with Big Brothers/Big Sisters Organization for a reading buddies program.

- Make sure the curriculum for kindergarten is developmentally appropriate, respecting the needs of individual children.

- Examine your motivation for having a full- or extended-day program.

- Look at the needs of the community and solicit input from family members. Find out what they want for their children.

- Making the transition into first grade works better when the students in the kindergarten class visit the first-grade classroom several times during the school year.

- Have the first hour of the morning be the least structured part of the day, for children to adjust to the day and to accommodate parents who would like to spend time with their children.

For more information about Harborview's kindergarten programs, visit the Web site of another Harborview kindergarten teacher, Jack Fontanella, at www.jsd.k12.ak.us/hbv/classrooms/Fontanella/fontanejhbv.html

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## Location

Atkinson Elementary School
5800 S.E. Division St.
Portland, OR 97206

## Contact

Deborah Peterson, Principal
Phone: 503/916-6333
E-mail: atkinson@pps.k12.or.us
Web site:
www.pps.k12.or.us/schools-c/pages/atkinson/atkinson.html
School profile page:
www.pps.k12.or.us/schools-c/profiles/?id=234

## Description

Atkinson Elementary is a Title I school located in the urban, outer-east side of Portland. The student body is a diverse mix of ethnic groups and cultures; more than 40 percent are English language learners. This diversity defines the student and staff spirit and experience at the school and makes it a positive, welcoming environment for all students. The warm atmosphere is demonstrated with welcoming posters in five languages—Chinese, Russian, Spanish, Vietnamese, and English—on the wall. Staff members are in the hallways to greet parents every morning as they drop off their children.

For the 2002–2003 school year, Atkinson Elementary offers four options for kindergarten:

- Full-day Monday, Wednesday, Friday with 30 minutes Spanish instruction. In-school childcare is available on non-school days.



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- Full-day Tuesday, Thursday, Friday with 30 minutes Mandarin Chinese instruction. In-school childcare is available on non-school days.

- Full-day, Monday–Friday K–1 mixed age and looped, with Spanish instruction four days a week, 30 minutes per day. Students stay with the same teacher for two years.

- Full-day, Monday–Friday, Spanish immersion. Children are taught in Spanish for 90 percent of the day, in English for the remaining 10 percent.

Children enrolled in the free- and reduced-price meal program do not have to pay an enrollment fee for the full-day programs. For other students, tuition is $2,080 per year ($215 per month, except for June which is only $145) for the first child in a family, half price for second child. The 2002 year is the first year the school has had to charge tuition for full-day due to budget shortfalls.

Neighborhood families receive first preference for kindergarten programs. Then, a waiting list is established and children are randomly selected from the list to build classes balanced by gender, native language, ethnicity, and special needs. The full-day immersion program is extremely popular. Last year the program received 95 applications for only 28 openings. Approximately 40 percent of the students are native speakers of Spanish. 8 percent are of Hispanic heritage, 40 percent are from the neighborhood, and 8 percent are from other schools.

Second language instruction begins in kindergarten for both native English speakers and English language learners. All



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kindergarten students receive language instruction in either Spanish or Mandarin Chinese for at least 30 minutes a day, four times a week. Last year the school applied for Title I schoolwide funding which allowed the school to refocus its instructional strategies for English language learners. Rather than pulling ELL children out of class, Atkinson started a "push-in" immersion program, with ELL specialist teachers now working with ELL students in the regular classroom.

In the immersion program, teachers and children speak Spanish for 90 percent of the time, and English 10 percent of the time. The goal for this program is for students to be at or above third-grade benchmarks by the end of the year. After one year, many students in the two-way immersion classes were above grade level and all but four students were at grade level. Says Peterson, "We use best practices in second language acquisition to teach our subject in Spanish. Over time, the Spanish speakers become fluent in English and complete their academic assignments at benchmark in English. The English speakers become fluent in Spanish and are capable of completing their academic assignments at benchmark in Spanish."

The full-day schedule is a mix of open-ended and scheduled lessons, grouped by ability, with a mix of active versus calm activities. One kindergarten teacher has definitely noticed the change in kindergarten goals of the last several years. "I feel like I'm teaching more of a first-grade curriculum now," she says. According to the principal and staff, this is necessary because Portland Public Schools benchmarks ask children to be reading at a particular level by second grade. Because of these increased standards, they say, teachers can no longer focus purely on social-emotional developmental needs in kindergarten as they once did—now they incorpo-



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rate more emergent literacy and numeracy skills. Teachers look for children's progress to continue at a certain pace throughout the year. Says Peterson "We believe in a balance here at Atkinson and want lessons that reflect the needs of the children. We'll keep our benchmarks at level 2 for reading at the end of kindergarten, but the reality will be that some children are not developmentally prepared to read at that level, so we'll do the pre-reading work with them to help them in the coming years to reach benchmarks."

Full-day kindergarten and immersion programs are not for all students, says Principal Deborah Peterson, which is one reason why a variety of options are offered. Peterson says she wants parents to have a clear understanding of the goals of an immersion program, and that an immersion program may not work well for some children.

The staff listen to the community's needs and concerns when designing the programs. Last year the principal mailed a survey to parents of incoming kindergartners to receive their input on planning the kindergarten programs for the following year. Many parents indicated that they would want to send their children to an alternating three-day program rather than five days. So, these options continue to be offered. Says Peterson. "We're constantly evaluating what our incoming customers want and adjusting based on the research and our families' needs." A recent family survey indicated that 97 percent of families believe the school is a good one, and 96 percent believe the school has a positive climate. Focus groups had similar responses.

The teachers and principal have made some observations on the full-day schedule:

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## Observed Outcomes/Benefits of Full-Day

- Fewer transitions for children who transfer from school to daycare.
- The principal and teachers notice a difference in readiness for first grade.

## Challenges of a Full-Day Schedule

- More balance is needed between the structured part of the day and the "noisy, open" day
- Children need time to put their heads down and rest
- More academic work is required of the students
- Alternating day schedules can be confusing for both students and teachers

## Tips for Success

- Full-day kindergarten programs need full district support.
- Use an application process to obtain a good match between class type and each child.
- Schedule goal-setting sessions with parents at the beginning of the year.
- Consider that parent involvement is much more than getting volunteers in the classroom. Parents feel invested in the school when the staff is there first thing in the mornings to



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greet them, when teachers visit children's homes, and parents feel free to contact teachers at their homes. Parents and teachers meet several times a year in conferences.

All Atkinson teachers have the same goal—to meet their students' social, developmental, and academic needs by providing developmentally appropriate activities focusing on children attaining benchmarks. These teachers realize that kindergarten is the foundation for the next years of schooling. High expectations in kindergarten help all students throughout their school career.

## Location

Whitman Elementary School
7326 S.E. Flavel St.
Portland, OR 97206

## Contact

Cynthia Lewis, Principal
Phone: 503/916-6370
School profile page:
www.pps.k12.or.us/schools-c/profiles/?id=290

## Description

Whitman is a diverse, Title I Schoolwide elementary school in east Portland. The cultural and linguistic diversity in the school is represented by 23 percent English language learners primarily from Latin America, Asia, and the former Soviet Union.

Whitman implemented its first year of full-day kindergarten classes in the 2001-2002 year. According to full-day teachers Pat Hassell and Carol Merriman, this came about for several reasons. There was continuing pressure on Whitman teachers to prepare kindergarten students for reaching the district's first-grade readiness benchmarks. The teachers realized there wasn't enough time in a regular half-day schedule to prepare the students adequately. They appealed to the principal for more instructional time. The principal was able to obtain funding for a full-day program through the Title I Schoolwide program. As part of this change, both the reading and mathematics curricula were expanded in the full-day schedule.

The school also wanted to implement full-day kindergarten to narrow the achievement gap between low-income and English



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language learners and other students. The school was responding to research showing that students from low-income families often do not have the same kind of learning opportunities in their non-school hours that other children have, which puts them at higher risk for not meeting standards.

Pat Hassell and Carol Merriman offer their observations after their first year of full-day implementation:

### Observed Outcomes/Benefits of Full-Day Kindergarten:

- More time to work on math every day, not just two days a week
- More time for individual reading activities: teachers can work on sounds and letters one-on-one with children, skills they need to be ready for first grade
- More time to work on large motor skills using games and other developmentally appropriate activities
- More time for developing themes, and working on science and art projects

Says Hassell, "We are not always hurrying now, and I don't have to make choices about what I can or cannot do because of limited time."

The full-day program creates fewer transitions between school and non-school hours if daycare is replaced by more kindergarten hours. The full-day program also allows chil-

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dren more time to make transitions during the day. "We have time to review with the children at the end of the day and the children have time to wind down before going home," comments Hassell. Adds Merriman, "Full-day also allows more time for teachers to do 'messy or involved' projects, because we don't have to spend time cleaning up to make way for the next class."

Because of the additional time, both teachers have observed that their students are better prepared developmentally, socially, and academically for first grade. They also agree that full-day should not be the only option for children, recommending that parents choose a kindergarten option based on their children's needs.

## Tips for Success

- ◇ Conduct a needs analysis of your community to see how many parents are interested in this option, how this fits in with district and school goals, and what the funding opportunities will be.

- ◇ Conduct research on kindergarten options and visit other full-day kindergarten classes.

Since this was the first year of full-day scheduling, Whitman teachers are still learning and making adjustments. Both teachers believe their classes can benefit from each other's different learning approaches by switching classrooms during the week. Hassell has an early childhood focus for teaching—he guides the children in exploring their own choices. In his classroom built around work stations, children can investigate worms in one area, and work on



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arts projects in another. Merriman's class is more structured. She often has the children in large-group instruction, not always with the whole class, which allows her to pay attention to the needs and levels of the individual child. It is good, they say, for children to have a balance between "quiet, structured time" and "noisier" exploration time. Hassell and Merriman are also considering different emergent literacy instructional approaches to better prepare children for reading in the first grade. One approach would be to spend more time on phonemic awareness and then move on to beginning reading groups.

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## Location

Cascade Elementary School (preK-1)
89 SW 3rd St.
Chehalis, WA 98532

## Contact

Joyce Bacoccina, Principal
Bill Blair, Kindergarten teacher
E-mail: bblair@chehalis.k12.wa.us
Phone: 360/748-8853

## Description

Cascade is a Title I Schoolwide elementary school located in an urban area about 100 miles south of Seattle. Cascade is the one school in the district offering kindergarten (Cascade is pre-K-1, Bennett Elementary 2-3, and Olympic Elementary 4-5). Forty percent of students are enrolled in the free and reduced-price meal program.

Cascade Elementary has offered full-day kindergarten for seven years. Currently, the school offers six full-day classes. We talked with Bill Blair, a full-day kindergarten teacher who has taught at Cascade since the beginning of full-day implementation.

The impetus for beginning a full-day program was Washington State's education reform requirements for all students, the Essential Academic Learning Requirements. The principal brought all staff together to brainstorm ideas for promoting learning in the context of the new requirements. Specifically, the district administration wanted to focus on those children who performed lowest on standard-

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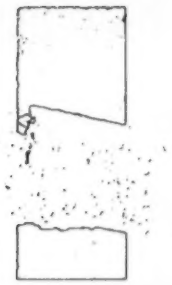

ized tests (in the third and fourth quartiles). The collaborative decisionmaking process developed a lot of support among the staff for implementing these changes.

After much discussion, three options were put on the table to consider: full-day kindergarten, grades 1–2 multiage grouping, or grades 1–2 looping (same teacher follows first grade class to second grade). The school was then K–2. "Although the research at the time on full-day kindergarten was scant," says Blair, "the decision to have a full-day option was based on our experience that twice as much learning time could only mean more help for struggling children. We promised parents that their children would have more time to develop more skills than in a half-day class." From the three options, it was decided to implement two full-day kindergarten classes with multiage classes the first year, and looping the second year. During the first year, the school charged $165 a month tuition for full-day. Now there is no tuition. The principal chose teachers who were flexible and had a focus on their children achieving standards with developmentally appropriate practices. Says Blair, "We looked long and hard at different frameworks for full-day kindergarten, visiting other classes and doing research."

Informational meetings about the full-day option were held for the public during the evenings. Although some parents didn't believe in charging tuition, the idea was well received. Because the meetings were open to the public, emphasized Blair, people were less likely to be concerned about the changes.

Blair offers some observations on outcomes, benefits, challenges, and tips for success on having a full-day kindergarten.



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## Observed Outcomes/Benefits of Full-Day

- More continuity and time with students is available if only one class rather than two half-day classes are taught.
- As the state adds more subject areas to the assessment schedules, (children are first tested in fourth grade), it is more important that the younger children "get on the right track" earlier in their schooling.
- Full-day kindergarten allows much more time for comprehensive mathematics, reading, and writing curriculum, independent reading, journal writing, and project work.
- There is more time for "cognitively guided learning." In math children have time to ask more questions, to explore topics, and to deepen their learning and investigations. This process takes more time.
- There is more time for "thoughtful playing." "I put out particular toys and plan play activities for specific, planned purposes," says Blair.
- Full-day kindergarten allows more flexibility for parents to volunteer during the day. Blair often has about 10 parents a week in his classroom.
- Parents have more opportunities to voice their thoughts about their child's education.
- Full-day children entering first grade are more prepared for first-grade structure and curriculum.



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## Challenges of a Full-Day Schedule

- Some kids get tired, and allowances need to be made for them.
- Sustained funding is necessary.
- With six full-day classes, space becomes an issue. Sometimes grants will include facilities funding. Districts also need to look at funding for supplies.
- Finding after-school childcare may be more challenging for parents than finding full-day care. At Chehalis, after-school care is provided by the YMCA at the school for children in full- and half-day programs. The school provides the space in exchange for services provided.

## Keys to Success

- Find programs in other schools to visit. Most teachers will want to observe how the full day works. They want to ask the "nitty gritty questions" such as: What is the schedule like? Do specialists serve students (e.g., music, PE, library)? Do you have naptime? Do your students have/need snacks? How do you deliver reading instruction to a wide range of development?
- Look at all available research on full-day kindergarten.
- Involve staff and community in making the decision to move to a different schedule. If a change appears to be a top-down decision, it probably won't work.

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◇ Have common goals, standards, benchmarks for all children. Make sure these are well-coordinated and understood.

◆ Use older students as reading buddies.

◆ Use parent volunteers as a valuable resource

# FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN STUDIES

Below is a sampling of recent studies on full-day kindergarten. Consult the entire study for more detailed information about methodology and results.

**Elicker, J., & Mathur, S. (1997).** What do they do all day? Comprehensive evaluation of a full-day kindergarten. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 12*(4), 459–480.

Elicker and Mathur's two-year study of four full-day and eight half-day kindergarten classes in a middle-class suburb of Wisconsin found that children in full-day classrooms spent more time "engaged in child-initiated activities (especially learning centers), more time in teacher-directed individual work, and relatively less time in teacher-directed large groups.... Kindergarten report card progress and readiness for first grade were rated significantly higher for full-day children" (p. 459). Elicker mentions that this study employed a true experimental design as children were randomly selected for the class, and preexisting differences were statistically controlled (p. 6).

**Hildebrand, C. (2001).** *Effects of three kindergarten schedules on achievement and classroom behavior* (PDK Research Bulletin No. 31). Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa International. Retrieved October 24, 2002, from http://www.pdkintl.org/edres/resbul31.htm

A study of 147 students in a Midwestern school district that compared full-day, half-day, and alternating full-day kindergarten found "no clear differential effects of kindergarten

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schedules" on either academic achievement or classroom social behaviors. Although the full-day kindergartners in the study did score "significantly higher" in reading than the other students, it was unclear whether this was related to the scheduling difference or to the teachers' approach to reading instruction.

**Nielsen, J., & Cooper-Martin, E. (2002).** *Evaluation of the Montgomery County Public Schools Assessment Program: Kindergarten and grade 1 reading report.* Rockville, MD: Montgomery Public Schools, Office of Shared Accountability. Retrieved October 24, 2002, from /http://www.mcps.k12.md.us/departments/dea/pdf/Kinder2002.pdf

This study of Montgomery County, Maryland, Public Schools looked at the effects of the second year of the kindergarten initiative, which expanded full-day kindergarten, reduced class size, and revised the curriculum. These schools were selected because they had the highest concentration of disadvantaged and low-income students. The full-day schedule was enhanced by a strengthened kindergarten curriculum including the extended time for "balanced literacy instruction," a strengthened instructional program in other academic areas, with specific blocks of time for "sustained high quality teaching." The student:teacher ratio for full-day classes was also reduced to 15:1. The study that compared the progress of students in the full-day program with those in half-day classes, included these key findings:

◇ Fifty-one percent of African American students from the full-day kindergarten class achieved first-grade benchmarks, compared to 49 percent of all first-grade African American students.



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- Forty-eight percent of students in free and reduced-price lunch programs from the full-day program achieved grade benchmarks as compared with 45 percent of all free and reduced-price lunch students.

- The second year of full-day kindergarten confirmed that children in free and reduced-price lunch and ESOL programs had the greatest rate of improvement compared to the half-day kindergarten program.

This study did not appear to control for the variability of class size. The student-teacher ratio in full-day classes was 15:1, where in half-day classes the ratio was 22:1. Therefore, it might be hard to isolate full-day as the main factor for higher achievement.

**Stofflet, F.P. (1998).** *Anchorage School District full-day kindergarten study: A follow-up of the kindergarten classes of 1987–88, 1988–89, and 1989–90.* Anchorage, AK: Anchorage School District. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED426790)

Anchorage School District's (1998) study of the long-term effects of full-day kindergarten found no major long-term effects related to the length of the kindergarten day. The researchers claim that it "is likely that, over the years, family background, individual study habits, and other school programmatic factors outweigh the 'kindergarten' factor." They did find, however, that students from Title I schools who attended full-day kindergarten were generally "better prepared for first grade than were their counterparts" who had attended half-day kindergarten (Stofflet, 1998, p. 24).

**Weiss, A.M.D.G., & Offenberg, R.J. (2002, April).** *Enhancing urban children's early success in school: The power of full-day*

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*kindergarten*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.

This study tracked 17,600 Philadelphia students from kindergarten into fourth grade. They found that students who had attended full-day kindergarten were 26 percent more likely than former half-day kindergartners to make it to third grade without repeating a grade. Full-day kindergarten students also had "significantly higher achievement scores in reading, math, and science, higher report card marks and better attendance" by third grade (p. 2), although by fourth grade they had higher achievement in science only, and higher attendance. The authors acknowledge that more research is needed on the content of the curriculum—how the additional time is used, and other variables—parent education levels, and pre-kindergarten education experience (p. 17).

**Welsh, J. (November 13, 2002)**. *Full-day kindergarten a plus*. Pioneer Press: Minneapolis Public Schools (2002). All-day kindergarten narrows the gap in early literacy. [News release]. Retrieved November 14, 2002, from www.mpls.k12.mn.us/news/news_release/all_day_k.shtml.

Minneapolis Public Schools released a study showing that Native American, Hispanic, and African American full-day kindergarten students have made significant gains in literacy achievement compared with their peers in half-day programs. In particular, these full-day students had accelerated performance in vocabulary, rhyming, onset phonemes, oral comprehension, letter sounds, and print concepts. For example, gains in letter sounds were 30 percent higher than that for half-day students. [For more detailed information, review new assessment data on the Web site.]

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Jacobson, L. (2000, February 23). Kindergarten study taking long view. *Education Week, 19*(24), 1, 12-13. Retrieved October 24, 2002, from www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=24kinder.h19

Towers, J.M. (1991). Attitudes toward the all-day, everyday kindergarten. *Children Today, 20*(1), 25-28.

Wang, Y.L., & Johnstone, W.G. (1999). Evaluation of a full-day kindergarten program. *ERS Spectrum, 17*(2), 27-32.


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## A Sampling of Kindergarten, Literacy, and School Readiness Resources

**Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement** [CIERA] (http://www.ciera.org)

**National Center for Early Development and Learning** (supported by the U.S. Dept. of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement and operated by the FPG Child Development Center, UNC-Chapel Hill (http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/)

**Reading Pathfinder** (sponsored by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education (www.readingpath.org/age/kinder.html) This site has many resources for administrators, teachers, and parents on kindergarten and literacy instruction

**Ready Web: An Electronic Collection of Resources on School Readiness** (sponsored by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education) (http://ericps.crc.uiuc.edu/readyweb/)

Fromberg, D.P. (1995). *The full-day kindergarten: Planning and practicing a dynamic themes curriculum* (2nd ed.). New York, NY; Teachers College Press.

Neuman, S.B., Copple, C., & Bredekamp, S. (2000). *Learning to read and write: Developmentally appropriate practices for young children.* Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.



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Saluja, G., Scott-Little, C., & Clifford, R.M. (2000). Readiness for school: A survey of state policies and definitions. Early Childhood Research and Practice: *An Internet Journal on the Development, Care, and Education of Young Children*, (2)2. Retrieved October 29, 2002, from http://www.ecrp.uiuc.edu/v2n2/saluja.html

Snow, C.E., Burns, M.S., & Griffin, P. (Eds.). (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press. Retrieved October 27, 2002, from http://books.nap.edu/html/prdyc/

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Published quarterly for NWREL member institutions

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
101 S.W. Main Street, Suite 500
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This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education under contract number ED-01-CO-0013. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

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